



<a href="#">Talk</a>	<a href="#">Blog</a>	<a href="#">Radio</a>	<a href="#">Columnists</a>	<a href="#">Your Opinion</a>	<a href="#">The News</a>	<a href="#">Photos</a>	<a href="#">Funnies</a>	<a href="#">Books &amp; Movies</a>	<a href="#">Issues</a>	<a href="#">Action Center</a>
----------------------	----------------------	-----------------------	----------------------------	------------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------	-------------------------------

## It's Time to Put Children First

By **John Boehner**

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

Last week, the House of Representatives considered several resolutions to congratulate sports teams and one measure hailing Brett Favre, the soon-to-be Hall of Fame quarterback for the Green Bay Packers. This week we've already named three post offices. Yet, what has not occurred is a single meeting among a bipartisan group of Members in the House and Senate to discuss completing work on critical legislation to renew the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and sending the President a bill he can sign into law.

President Bush vetoed the Democrats' SCHIP bill two weeks ago and House Republicans will sustain his veto when it comes before the House tomorrow. So, what happens after Democrats fail to override the veto? The way I see it, my Democratic colleagues face a very basic choice: either work with Republicans to renew SCHIP and accomplish something on behalf of low-income children or continue to play politics and refuse any bipartisan discussions whatsoever.

Based on their initial response, it's safe to say that we already have our answer. The Senate Majority Leader said "we're not going to compromise" and the Speaker of the House said "we've compromised all we can compromise." Indeed, instead of working with Republicans to find common ground, Democratic-backed groups are pouring millions in TV and radio ads in an attempt to defeat GOP candidates in the next election. Underscoring their politics-first approach, Democratic leaders even chose to delay for two weeks the veto override vote they have acknowledged they will lose. Meanwhile, millions of low-income children wait for a bipartisan renewal of SCHIP.

Rather than waging a war of words through the media, Democrats and Republicans alike should be meeting in the Capitol, sitting across from a table working to craft a responsible bill that puts low-income children first. But we aren't. Instead, Democratic leaders have chosen to drag out this process, confirming once again they are more concerned with the next election than they are with expanding health care access for low-income children.

In 1997, under a Republican-led Congress, both parties worked together to establish SCHIP to cover low-income children who have no health insurance. A decade later, the program is working well, but it could be working even better. More than 500,000 children under 200 percent of poverty are eligible for SCHIP right now, yet they are not covered. Thousands of children in my home state of Ohio – children who are eligible for this program – remain without coverage. We have a responsibility to make sure these low-income boys and girls are actually getting covered. Right now, too many simply are not.

One of the primary reasons? States have diverted critical SCHIP funds by enrolling more than 700,000 adults nationwide, according to the Congressional Research Service. For example, 87 percent of the SCHIP enrollees in Minnesota are adults, as are 66 percent of enrollees in Wisconsin and 53 percent of enrollees in Arizona. And that's where the fundamental difference in this SCHIP reauthorization lies: Republicans want to cover low-income children first, but Democrats don't. Instead, the Democratic bill would continue covering adults – not to mention middle and upper income families and potentially illegal immigrants. Moreover, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates this bill would cause two million Americans to drop private insurance to enroll in SCHIP. The program was meant to cover children who don't have any private health insurance, not those who already do.

House Republicans have outlined clear principles we hope can guide a bipartisan renewal of SCHIP, and we hope Democrats will work with us to improve this program on behalf of the American people. First, we believe any bill must put poor children first and not force children out of private health insurance. We believe SCHIP should cover low-income American children without using budget gimmicks that put the program in financial jeopardy. And we believe low-income and middle-class families need more health care options to purchase affordable, high quality health plans that best meet the needs of their families.

A new USA Today/Gallup Poll confirms that Americans support Republicans' primary goal in renewing SCHIP: covering low-income children first. According to the poll "52 percent agree with Bush that most benefits should go to children in families earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level — about \$41,000 for a family of four. Only 40 percent say benefits should go to families earning up to \$62,000, as the bill written by Democrats and some Republicans would allow."

SCHIP has a proven record of success in providing health coverage to lower-income children. House Republicans want to renew this critical program. Instead of covering adults and upper-income families, let's cover every eligible low-income child that this program was designed to help. That's what we committed to do in 1997 when we created the program – in a bipartisan way – and that goal should guide our efforts in 2007 as well.

The approval ratings of this Congress are at historic lows, largely because most Americans have failed to see any real accomplishments. If we're serious about doing what's in the best interests of low-income children, we should start by working together to strengthen SCHIP and ensure our tax dollars go towards those who need it most. We shouldn't let that opportunity for a real accomplishment to pass by because of partisan politics.

*John Boehner is the Republican Minority Leader for the House of Representatives.*

***Be the first to read John Boehner's column. [Sign up today](#) and receive Townhall.com delivered each morning to your inbox.***

**Copyright © 2006 Salem Web Network. All Rights Reserved.**